



**U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS**

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# **NEWS RELEASE**

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## **Vandalizing cultural sites on public lands may land you in jail**

**Omaha, Neb.** – In Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, three men are awaiting trial in U.S. District Court on felony charges of using spray paint to deface ancient tribal pictographs near Hells Gate State Park. The defaced rock art is on land that is part of a traditional Nez Perce site managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The pictographs are believed to be at least 2,500 years old. The vandalism is a violation of Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (ARPA) and, if convicted, each man faces fines of up to \$250,000 and up to 10 years in prison.

Archaeological resources on public lands are an irreplaceable part of the Nation’s heritage. These resources are increasingly endangered because of their commercial attractiveness. The purpose of ARPA, is to protect archaeological resources and sites located on Federal and Indian lands.

Federal laws prohibit the damage or removal of any material remains of past human life or activities which are of archaeological interest. Additionally, it is illegal to sell or knowingly purchase these items. Penalties for the destruction of these resources include: fines, forfeiture of artifacts and equipment used in the commission of the crime, imprisonment and monetary restitution for damages to sites.

Investigations begin as soon as an incident is identified. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Omaha District investigations usually begin with a call to the district’s cultural resource hotline: 1-866-No-SWIPE (1-866-667-9473). Callers can anonymously report illegal activity; including vandalism, looting, digging or sale of artifacts that may have been obtained illegally from Federal or Indian lands.

The Omaha District and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have recently entered into a partnership designed to enhance the investigation and prosecution of these cases. Personnel from both agencies work closely with Tribal, State and local law enforcement agencies to pursue criminal charges on incidents that take place on public lands administered by the Corps. As a direct result of this partnership, recent investigations in North and South Dakota have resulted in four felony convictions and seven misdemeanor convictions under ARPA, with sentences resulting in fines exceeding \$33,000, two terms in Federal prison – one for 8 months and another for 10 months, over 80 months of probation and one 6 month term of home confinement.

The public is reminded that archaeological, cultural, historic, and burial sites along the Missouri River are important resources to all Americans, both now and in the future. The Omaha District is dedicated to protecting and preserving these resources and cooperatively works with Federal, Tribal, State and local law enforcement authorities to that end.

The Corps is asking the public to help preserve these resources by leaving these sites undisturbed and contacting the Corps’ toll free number 1-866-No-SWIPE ( 1-866-667-9473) to report people illegally collecting artifacts.

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